



FEMA

Small Wisconsin Village Leads the Nation Rebuilds Above Floodwaters

Soldiers Grove, WI – Residents of the Village of Soldiers Grove in southwest Wisconsin created an innovative mitigation plan of their own. Instead of embracing a traditional dam and levee flood-proofing method to protect their community, they raised their town.

Beginning in 1907, repetitive flooding annoyed residents until 1935 when the first disastrous flood engulfed homes and businesses up and down the valley with sludge and mud. Congress directed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study flood options.

Delayed by wars, the study wasn't completed until 1962 when the Corps recommended a dam be built 36 miles upstream in addition to a levee around the village. The fully federally funded dam was attacked by environmentalists, and its future was uncertain.

The \$3.5 million village levee system would require Soldiers Grove to pay \$220,000 toward construction and an estimated \$10,000 in annual maintenance. The village's property was valued at less than \$1 million with an annual tax levy of \$14,000. These numbers did not add up for the citizens.

For decades the village, with an estimated population of 600, had debated a better plan – instead of spending all the money on trying to control the river, they proposed spending less to move the flood-prone areas of the town. Without significant financial support from higher levels of government, the move could not be accomplished.

The folks at the Village took a huge first step in 1977 and pooled their local and private resources together and with \$90,000 in public financing purchased the relocation site. They acquired 100 acres of uphill land away from the Kickapoo River floodplain along the re-routed state highway and hoped for eventual funding to realize their goal – raise the town.

Torrential rains in July 1978 brought damages in excess of a half million dollars. It was declared a natural disaster as the Kickapoo River exceeded its flood stage by over six feet. The local debate was over, and the community began selling their idea to the state and federal government with a united front.

Armed with the research results of feasibility studies and outside consultation paid for with small state grants, local officials convinced state and federal officials that the move would be the best flood-proofing for the Village - to buyout floodplain properties, demolish the structures, clear the land and rebuild the town uphill.

A combination of state and local funds provided over a third of the estimated \$6 million total project. The Village applied for and successfully received grants for the remaining cost from federal agencies including HUD's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). CDBG funds may be used to assist communities recovering from a disaster, especially in low-income areas.



Crawford County,
Wisconsin



Quick Facts

Year:
1978

Sector:
Public/Private Partnership

Cost:
\$6,000,000.00 (Estimated)

Primary Activity/Project:
Flood-proofing

Primary Funding:
Local Sources